

CLEEK OF SCOTLAND YARD

BY
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MR. MAVERICK NARKOM paced the floor of his private office in Scotland Yard in a state of keen excitement, for a report had just reached him of an accident to an important personage he had been instructed to protect. As Big Ben's last sonorous note of 12 came over the intervening distance he whipped round at the opening of the door behind him, and nodded curtly to Detective Sergeant Hammond, who stood in the frame of the open doorway.

"Well!" rapped out the superintendent, in a fury of impatience. "It was only a petty gas explosion, wasn't it? Speak up, man! It's not another bomb mystery!"

Detective Sergeant Hammond shook his head. "I'm afraid it is, sir," said he gravely, "and Count Egon Estamar, son of the Hungarian ambassador, has been killed. Shall I tell Lennard to bring round the limousine, sir?"

"Confound the limousine!" cried Mr. Narkom, excitedly hitting his hands together. "It's Mr. Cleek I want, Hammond; and what the deuce has become of him Heaven alone knows!"

He stopped short, and sucked in his breath, as the sharp, insistent ring of the telephone bell caused him to jump at his instrument.

"Is that you, old chap?" he cried, as he recognized the voice. "We're in a dreadful hole. You'll meet me—oh, good man! Start at once, won't you? Good-by."

"Well, here I am, you old fidget," said Cleek, a few minutes later, as he jumped into the car at the meeting place. "Sorry I wasn't on tap the minute you rung. Didn't get back to my digs until ten minutes ago. Been keeping out of sight a bit, as Waldemar of Mauravania and his hired apaches thugs have been particularly keen on my trail of late. He means to have me, Mr. Narkom, if having me is possible; and he's down to the last ditch and getting desperate."

"I know. They say that unless something happens very shortly to turn the tide in Ulric's favor and quell the cries for restoration, the King's downfall and expulsion are merely a matter of a few days at most. But what's that got to do with it that you suggest its bearing upon any need for haste on Waldemar's part?"

"Only that, with matters in such a state, he cannot long defer his return to the army of his country and the defense of his king," replied Cleek serenely. "And every day he loses in failing to pay his respects to your humble servant in the manner he desires to do increases the strain of the situation and keeps him from the service of his master."

"Oh, then, it's really a personal affair between you and him, after all?"

"Something like that. He doesn't approve of my—er—knowing things that I do know; and it would be the end of a very promising future for him if I told. Here—have a cigarette and smoke yourself into a better temper. You look savage enough to bite a nail in two."

The car ran on for a good half mile before either spoke again.

At length Cleek spoke again: "But I was explaining my delay, Mr. Narkom. I also had an adventure. I came across a poor devil of a fellow on Hampstead Heath. He'd evidently been knocked down and injured about the head; for all he could do was to writhe and twist about, his brain too badly injured to give any account of himself, or how or what had happened. And so, naturally, we had to stop and send him to the hospital."

"Yes, yes," broke in Narkom, "but you might have been blown up with a bomb or knifed. Besides, I've trouble enough at Hampstead as it is. To think that a man can be murdered in a perfectly empty house—an absolutely empty room—right under the telescopes of two of our men told off to watch him, and have no more idea than Queen Anne how it was done; and, in addition to that, complete plans of fortifications destroyed, worth a fortune."

Cleek sat up suddenly and threw out his chin.

"Hello! that sounds interesting," said he with a flicker of the eyebrows. "An empty house, eh? Whereabouts, pray?"

"In Harebourn Square—Hampstead, strangely enough. Why?"

For Cleek drew himself up suddenly, his brows puckered and his face went very grave.

"A queer coincidence," he muttered. "But let's have the details of the case. When and where and how did the affair begin?"

"Yesterday when I had a special message from the war office that they were sending some one for the Yard's help to whom I was to pay special attention—no less than the Hungarian Ambassador, Count Estamar—I darsay you have heard of him, Cleek?"

"I have, as it happens," admitted that gentleman with a faint smile. "I believe in his younger days he was attached to whom I was to pay special attention—no less than the Hungarian Ambassador, Count Estamar—I darsay you have heard of him, Cleek?"

too, to Adela von Althurg, his cousin, and countless in her own right. It's not that boy that has been hurt."

"But it is," said the superintendent sadly. "He was killed little more than an hour ago—that's the amazing part of it!"

"Killed!" Cleek hunched up his shoulders and gave vent to a little clicking sound, and sat very still for a moment. Then, "How did it come about?"

"He was carrying the original texts of several secret treaties. The Hungarian government had been having them drawn up here in the embassy, and Count Estamar, the father, had a lively dread lest the nature of the contents should have leaked out and an attack be made upon the young man."

"One moment, please. Did any one in London know that these treaties were being copied?"

"Only one—his secretary, Fritz Tarleschen, a young man absolutely devoted to the family and equally incapable of betraying his master even if he were ungrateful enough."

"Why ungrateful?" asked Cleek quickly.

"Because he owes his life to young Count Egon. Several months ago he fell overboard while on board a pleasure yacht, and Count Egon jumped in after him and rescued him. But the nervous shock had injured his throat, and he was rendered incapable of speech."

"A bonny boy, indeed," said Cleek with an approving nod of the head. "It doesn't seem as if anything could leak out if this secretary was unimpeachable."

"Oh, yes; they are sure of him. It was Fritz Tarleschen who copied the treaties, and got them ready for his young master to take to Dover this morning by the 11:40 from Victoria. And so—I say, what the dickens are you muttering about? I don't believe you're listening."

Cleek gave a dry little smile and twitched up his head.

"Oh, yes, I am, Mr. Narkom," said he serenely. "But that name—Tarleschen—it sounds familiar. But of course not! He couldn't speak. H-m-m! No!" he plucked up his chin reflectively. "Well, go on. Then what happened?"

"Well, when the papers were ready, Count Estamar came down to me privately and asked me to appoint two plain-clothes men to watch over his son from the time he left the Hungarian consulate, at 11 o'clock, till he reached Dover, when the papers were to be handed over to another envoy. The count thought that he could trust no one better than his own son. Well, it seems, as far as I can make out, that young Estamar came out of the consulate, presumably with the papers; had a taxi summoned, and directed to Victoria, in order to catch the 11:40 Dover express; and our men followed at a discreet distance. When he got to Grosvenor road, however, he evidently gave fresh directions to the driver, and off he went to this empty house in Harebourn square, where he was blown to pieces before their eyes. No sight or sound of a bomb or shot—not a soul in sight but the two police officers—the house and room empty, as they could see by their glasses. What do you make of it, old chap?"

"H-m-m!" said Cleek. "And what has been done so far?"

"Nothing," admitted the superintendent. "I had to communicate with Count Estamar, who is nearly crazy, and has had the body identified and removed by special permission to his own house."

"I see," said Cleek. "Well, I've a fancy to be out of town myself, so you might put Lieut. Deland on the job this time; and, with your permission, I'll use your locker and fix that gentleman up. Tell Lennard to drive round through the park to Curzon street." And while Mr. Narkom gave the necessary instructions his famous ally pulled down the blinds, whipped open the useful receptacle, and was soon busy in transforming himself into the smart young army officer who belonged to a regiment that never existed.

"Here we are at last," said Mr. Narkom, as the limousine drew up in front of Count Estamar's town house in Curzon street. Two minutes later they were ushered into the presence of Count Friedrich Estamar himself.

"Thank heaven you have come so swiftly!" he said. "But, alas! it is too late. Oh, it is terrible—awful!"

Cleek let his eyes rest upon the stricken man, with an infinite pity in their depths.

"He may have been lured there," Cleek said gently, and even as he spoke came a loud, sharp intaken breath, almost like a gasp.

He turned to look into the eyes of a girl, sweet-faced and smiling, like a young lily sprung up suddenly in the darkness of the chamber room.

"She was standing between the crimson plush curtains that screened off one room from the other, and it was evident that she had heard Cleek's remark. He did not need the introduction to tell him that this was Adela, Countess von Althurg, nor did it need a keen eye to detect that she was suffering not only the pangs of grief, but of wounded love as well."

"Lured there," you said, Lieut. Deland," she reiterated, when they had seated themselves. "Then why did he have a key hand, and why was he talking so earnestly to a woman, promising to meet her at that same house only this morning—no engrossed that he never heard me call him? He had looked himself in the study here, so that he should not be disturbed. Lured, indeed! Oh, no; there is no help for it. He was a traitor—a traitor to his country and to me. If only I had known what it all meant I might have prevented the theft of the papers."

"Just so," said Cleek. "Tell me, count, did your son have access to the papers?"

"Yes, I had the safe here where the

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papers were placed on their completion yesterday. I was to have handed them to him myself when he left, but he anticipated me."

"I see, I see," Cleek stood a moment, pinching his chin reflectively. Then he switched round upon the countess.

"The woman—" he said serenely. "I suppose you do not know her name?"

"As it happens, I do," threw in the countess, with a fierce little laugh. "Oh, I know it was hardly honorable, but I listened—yes, I loved him better than life itself—and when I heard him speak to her in endearing terms I think my

heart stopped beating. I could have killed her with my bare hands. I—" her voice trailed off into silence, for, of a sudden, Cleek's head went up and a queer light shone in his eyes.

"Tell me—her name?" he said quietly, his eyes upon her face.

"He called her Margot. I did not hear the last name."

"Margot!"

The word sprang involuntarily from Cleek's lips. Mr. Narkom echoed it blankly.

Then the countess gave a little sharp intaken breath.

"You know her, too?" she said with some suspicion in her voice. "Who is she?"

"Head of the worst gang of continental spies in existence," gave back Cleek grimly. "That's who she is—the devil! And if that poor boy got into her cursed clutches—"

Cleek waited a moment, and then threw in a quick question.

"What country are these treaties affecting, Count Estamar? Or can't you tell me?" he asked quickly.

"A little kingdom called Mauravania. You no doubt have seen today's papers in regard to conditions there. All I say is that if a certain faction led by Count Waldemar, of Mauravania, could destroy them it would mean much to them. They want further time, and the loss of these papers means that they have got it. But what has that to do with my son?"

"Nothing, save that Margot has been in the employ of Waldemar in previous dark dealings," said Cleek. "But we shall see. Meanwhile, Mr. Narkom has told me about your son's companion, Mr.

some member, he replaced the sheet, stooping to pick up some shreds of cotton-wool which had fallen down at the side of the hastily improvised bed.

The sight of a brand-new leather hat-box seemed to rivet his attention, and he went over and picked it up.

"This is the box, I suppose? We will hold this for a few hours."

As they came down the hall a ray of sunlight had streamed through the drawn blinds, and, striking one of the glass-rod prisms of the chandelier in the high roof, sent many little shafts of rainbow-colored light zigzagging across the marble floor. At sight of them Cleek's



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face went suddenly gray—curiously pinched, curiously tired.

"Impossible!" he said softly. "Utterly impossible! And yet, if it is—"

He plunged down the stairs, at the bottom of which stood the Count Estamar.

"Count," he said in a strangely quick voice, "I should like to make a few inquiries at the embassy, if you don't mind, for some possible clues; and I may have something to report at the end of the day. Thanks. Come along, Mr. Narkom. By the way, was your son ever vaccinated?"

"Yes—once—why?"

"No matter now. Adieu."

He scuttled down the steps, followed by the bewildered superintendent, and gave the direction to Lennard to "streak it" to Harebourn Square.

As the door closed behind them and they were alone Mr. Narkom leaned forward and laid a hand upon Cleek's arm.

"Any ideas, old chap?" he said eagerly. But he hardly expected the reply Cleek gave him.

"Heads!" said that gentleman enigmatically. "Heads. But the solution lies in the rainbow and those who made it, and if I only knew whether vaccination marks were ever duplicates I should be able to tell you a good deal more. At present you shall go on to Harebourn Square and I will join you there in half an hour."

When Cleek arrived at the house in Harebourn Square, he found, strangely enough, that very little damage had been done to the actual room. It was self-evident that the invisible death had come from above, not from below, and as he stood looking and pondering a particu-

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lar of black caught his eye. He swooped down on it joyously, with a little yelp of delight.

"Got it!" he shouted. "Blithering idiot that I am! Why didn't I guess it before? That stuff could be knocked about until—of course!" He plunged out of the room, and down the steps, until he got to the line of policemen.

"I want the man on point duty," he flung out; then his eyes lit up again as a tall "Bobbie" stepped forward and saluted. "You, Boyce, is it? That's good. A man of your intelligence is bound to have noted something in this case. How many houses are there in this square altogether—and who live in them? Do you know?"

"Yes, sir, as it happens, I do," was the alert response. "There are only eight. This is the list."

He handed it to Cleek, who perused it with a sort of intensified eagerness; then handed it back to the man.

"No use climbing up that tree, then. Where there are any suspicious characters in the square this morning—organ grinders or carts—when the explosion occurred?"

"No, sir—only a moving van."

"Anybody moving?"

"No, sir; that's what made me look at it, not expecting to see one in a closed square like this—that and the funny look of the driver's seat. I took the name and address. Here it is, sir—'Dallington & Co., Furnival street.' But when the explosion occurred, of course, I rushed off, and I expect the van drove away, for I didn't see it again."

"H'm! And what was the funny part about the van's appearance?" put in Cleek placidly, twisting up in his fingers the tiny scrap of black stuff that lay in his hand.

Boyce gave an apologetic laugh.

"Nothing much, sir," said he. "But it struck me queer for it to be lined throughout with zinc. I couldn't help but think how it was pretty cold to sit upon, and with a door at their back—why, lor' lumme, what is it, sir?"—for Cleek gave vent to a little cry of unalloyed delight.

"The clever devils!" he rapped out sharply. "Splendid, Boyce, my lad!" Then he turned to the superintendent, who was standing near. "I know all I want to know now, Mr. Narkom," he said serenely, and straightway made for the limousine.

But at the door of it he paused, pulled out his notebook and scribbled something on a leaf and put it into Mr. Narkom's hand. "Find out if poor Fritz Tarleschen is there at Charing Cross Hospital and compare the imprint of this vaccination mark with his if he's there. I've got just one call to make, and I'll join you there in half an hour. Also have a plain-clothes man trace that van."

It was barely an hour later when Lieut. Deland was admitted once more into the presence of Count Estamar and the Countess Adela. As he entered there came a telephone message for him from Mr. Narkom, who had been delayed at Scotland Yard.

"Was Tarleschen there, Mr. Narkom?" queried Cleek, as he went to the instrument.

"Good Lord, no," answered Narkom's voice. "The Charing Cross Hospital authorities had never even heard of the accident, much less seen him. Also, you were right about the van. It was chartered by the spy known to us as Z. X., and our men are hot on his trail. The van, which we have seized, contains some electrical devices like a wireless outfit."

"Good! That's just as I thought, but I fear we shall not get Z. X. this time. I found my patient, however. You'll hear from me soon." As he turned from the telephone he smilingly went to the door. Outside there was a confused hubbub of voices, and in the doorway appeared two servants half carrying the bandaged figure of a man.

"Egon!" cried both the count and countess together; and they sped to him like two arrows impelled by a single bow.

Traitor or not, it was evident that affection still reigned in the hearts of both father and fiancée for this man who had faced death so shortly ago.

"Get him to bed quickly," interposed Cleek, "for the doctors will not answer for his ultimate recovery. See; they are waiting." He waved to the door, where appeared a silk-hatted figure and two hospital nurses, who in a twinkling had rescued their patient and carried him off to a room upstairs.

"But what does it mean? Who is that other?" Count Estamar made a gesture toward the dead man upstairs.

"Who should it be," gave back Cleek grimly, "but the real traitor, Gustave Moesle, alias Fritz Tarleschen, a spy of some renown."

"Fritz! My God—Fritz!" broke out the count excitedly. "It is incredible—impossible! Fritz! Then does it mean that Egon, my son, is not after all—"

"A—traitor," concluded Cleek softly, with a tender smile. "No, count, no traitor comes from your line after all. No, Countess von Althurg, you let your jealousy run away with you when you fancied it was your lover talking to the head of the Apache gang. Indeed, it was Tarleschen clad in his clothing, and it was Tarleschen who was followed by the detective this morning as he went, still disguised, on the errand that caused his death."

"But he could not speak," protested the girl, her eyes shining.

"That," answered Cleek, "was only a part of his pose. Gustave Moesle was a clever spy and had the reputation of being able to carry out his plans, no matter how long it took him. For over a year he has been awaiting his supreme

opportunity here, but conditions in Mauravania forced his hand and made it necessary to resort to desperate methods to obtain the secret papers immediately. The facts we have obtained dovetail exactly. Note that it was his aim to throw suspicion on the loss of the papers on young Count Egon."

"Here is a part of what I have ascertained. Last night, according to your head chauffeur, Count, Moesle, alias Tarleschen, took out Egon's small car, explaining by his usual finger method of talk that he was going to meet Egon, who was then out. The next bit of information comes through a coincidence. I myself happened to be in Hampstead this morning and found Egon by the roadside, badly injured, apparently robbed and with all obvious marks of identification removed. As it seemed an ordinary case, I simply reported it to the Hampstead police and sent the young man to the Cottage Hospital."

"At Scotland Yard I find a report to the effect that a young man was run down by an automobile—not far from here, either—and that another young man quickly drew up in a smart run-about, handed the officer on point duty the card of Count Egon, and said that the victim was his secretary, Fritz Tarleschen. He insisted that he should be allowed to carry the injured youth off to Charing Cross Hospital. This the officer allowed. Meanwhile, the machine which had struck the real Count Egon had vanished—indeed, it never stopped, and the officer only obtained one good glimpse of it. Of course, a search for this machine was begun immediately."

"Next morning I find a young man, stripped of marks of identification, far away in Hampstead. We may assume that the spy Moesle, alias Tarleschen, masquerading as Count Egon, carried the real Egon there in the borrowed car, and on the way, in some lonely spot, searched him for the coveted papers."

"I doubted that Egon really was the victim of the explosion from the first. For one thing, I was attracted by the double vaccination on the left arm of the body upstairs and quickly found in our records that that was one of the known marks of identification of the spy Moesle."

"We do not need to assume that the running down of Egon was an accident, for the car which struck him has been traced to a garage operated by a Frenchman who has as regular patrons a gang of Paris apaches in the employ of Count Waldemar, of Mauravania. The plans of Scotland Yard in regard to this garage and its patrons are another story."

"But the explosion," broke in Count Estamar; "who killed this Tarleschen, and why?"

"That is a political crime, for which there probably never will be reparation, though Mr. Narkom is tracing its perpetrators," answered Cleek. "By this time they have all fled from English soil. Tarleschen was the victim of another hand of spies, for the agents of the monarchy adjoining Mauravania, which we need not name, but whose desperate efforts to make capital out of the present revolution in Mauravania are known to us all, have also had their eyes on these secret treaties. Certainly they knew from their agents on the continent that these treaties were to be sent within the next few days. Their aim was to destroy the messenger and in the confusion obtain the papers. The method used was the new discovery—that scientific marvel—the ultra-ultra rays. So when I found that lead-cased van had stopped outside the house on the other side of the square I knew where the exploding force had come from. Yet on such little things do big events hang, that had not Tarleschen stopped to steal the count's hat, even then he would have escaped."

"What had the hat got to do with it? Everything, for it was lined with the new gun-cotton, which is composed largely of nitryl, and can be handled as roughly as you please until the disintegrating power of the chemical rays of light are applied. I found a piece of the hat and examined the hatbox, which was obviously one of foreign make, and not, therefore, belonging to Leath's of Oxford street. It hardly needed my inquiry there to tell me that they had sent neither boy nor hatbox. When Tarleschen laid his plans with Margot, agent for the Mauravania, the other spies followed on with their death-dealing van. Of course, they wanted the plot to steal the papers and were the more willing to use their diabolical device upon the spy than upon an accredited government agent."

"But the treaties," moaned Count Estamar. "My boy is saved, and his honor, and for that I am more thankful than I ever can say; but what of my home? If the treaties, after all, were stolen?"

Cleek stopped, and fumbling in his pocket, brought out an officially sealed envelope, upon which Count Estamar opened it with trembling fingers.

"Where—where was it?" he exclaimed as he ran the precious papers through his fingers, as if to assure himself of their actual presence.

Cleek's eyes twinkled.

"In Count Egon's red flannel chest protector, which Tarleschen never thought of touching. I expect he must have had some fears himself, and sewed them next to his own brave young heart several days ago, or Tarleschen would have got them from the safe with the keys he stole from Egon. Evidently the spy Tarleschen was on his way to report his failure to find the papers when he was killed. And now, count, you see how you misjudged him."

The count looked at the young countess and the countess sent her eyes back to the old count's; then their hands came together.